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ABSTRACT

This Digest discusses engagement in alternative preparation to acquire a license to teach in U.S. public schools. Prospective teachers seek alternative programs for many reasons, including job change due to forced retirement or lack of interest; desire to contribute to society's wellbeing; and desire to use teaching skills learned elsewhere. Recent educational debate has centered on teacher knowledge. Education degree programs from the 1950s-1980s were deficient in content knowledge. However, alternative licensing candidates usually acquire knowledge of a particular area while studying for their bachelor's degree, and they have broad general content knowledge from core college programs. Alternative licensing requires successful completion of certain tests. The most widely used series in the United States is the PRAXIS. Because of increased demand for qualified teachers and lack of traditional bachelor's degree candidates, many teacher education institutions have modified traditional program offerings. A 1996 listing shows 328 alternative programs in 47 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories. Most teachers seek employment near where they reside, though moving to find employment has been simplified by the Interstate Compact, a mutual agreement by 38 states and the District of Columbia to recognize each other's licenses. Alternative preparation is closely watched by teacher education institutions, state departments of education, and educational researchers to examine whether it contributes to improving educational quality or further masks problems related to teacher quality. Overall, data present a mixed picture about the value of alternative paths. (Contains 25 references.) (SM)

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"I Already Have a Bachelor's Degree, How Can I Obtain a Teaching License?"

Joan M. Ferraro

Employment mobility and mid-career changes have increased the number of professional persons looking for more efficient access to classroom teaching (Dill & Stafford, 1996). Furthermore, there seem always to be prospective teachers for whom the traditional road to licensing seems unnecessarily long and repetitive: e.g., military personnel who have successfully taught troops for years or competent private school teachers. In response to the greater demand of these professionals, as well as to the shortage of qualified teachers, the number of short-term credentialing programs has increased throughout the United States (Darling-Hammond, 1998). These programs, which provide intensified professional education to postbaccalaureate teacher candidates, are commonly labeled "alternative certification" (Sandlin, 1993). Program lengths vary, depending on the course work needed and the applicant's availability to attend classes and field experiences. Some programs culminate in a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree (see AACTE, 1996). This Digest provides a discussion of the process for becoming engaged in alternative preparation for acquiring a license to teach in a U.S. public school.

Motivation

There are many reasons why prospective teachers search for an appropriate alternative program. Some seek to change jobs because of forced retirement or because their current work no longer holds meaning or interest. However, some professionals express a desire to contribute to the good of society by addressing the needs of its children. Some, critical of the state of public education in the U.S. today, seek to be actively engaged in improving learning by becoming teachers. Others have developed teaching-related skills in other employment, and look to teaching as a useful extension of a previous career (Dill, 1994; Feistritzer & Chester, 1996). Still others see a need, such as the dearth of classroom role models for minority children, to which they can respond by fulfilling that role (Dill, 1994; Ludlow & Wienke, 1994). The important point of motivation is that it be student-centered; that is, focused on the ethical

responsibility of a teacher—the academic and social development of individual children. Quality teaching requires a long-term commitment from preparation to delivery of instruction in the classroom (Richardson, 1997).

Requirements

One of the extensive debates of recent years in education has been about teacher knowledge. Education degree programs during the 1950s to 1980 generally were found to be deficient in content knowledge; prospective teachers learned how to teach, not what to teach (Abd-El-Khalick & BouJaoude, 1997; Miller & Corbin, 1990). In contrast, alternative licensing candidates usually have already acquired knowledge of a particular discipline or content area in study for their bachelor's degree. They also have broad general content knowledge from the core programs of their college or university. Researchers offered this qualification early on as a reason for supporting alternative programs (AACTE, 1989; Roth, 1986; Million, 1987).

However, some undergraduate degrees may seem more appropriate to teaching than others. For example, a psychology major or a liberal arts major at the B.A. level provides a strong foundation for understanding child development or the culture of the society, both areas of study in professional teacher education. Degrees in other professional areas, such as accounting or economics, may not satisfy state requirements for licensing. Candidates with such degrees may therefore find it necessary to take additional content course work (Hutchinson, 1997; McNamara, 1991).

Licensing for the primary and elementary levels demands a general distribution of content courses over the fields of English, social studies, math, science, art, music, and physical education. Secondary teaching requires a concentration in one area or two related areas, such as math and science. Usually, candidates who have not taught for at least one full year in a classroom at the level for which they are seeking a license must complete a supervised internship in student teaching at that level. Internships may vary in length, though a minimum of 10 weeks full time or its equivalent is standard

(NASDTEC, 1998; NCATE, 1995).

Testing

As with traditional licensing programs, alternative routes require the successful completion of certain tests. The most widely used series in the U.S. is the PRAXIS, administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). At least two-thirds of the states use some forms of the PRAXIS Series. Acceptable test score ranges are set individually by the states. ETS publishes an annual test manual and schedule with information about those states' test requirements; this is also available on its web site at: <http://www.ets.org>. States using other tests publish information about them in their list of requirements or on their web sites. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provides easy access to state department of education web sites at: <http://www.ccsso.org/seamenu.html>.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Because of the increased demand for qualified teachers and the lack of traditional bachelor's degree candidates to meet the need, many teacher education institutions have modified their traditional program offerings. In 1996, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) identified and published a directory of 328 alternative programs for licensing offered by its member institutions in 47 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories. The programs vary in time commitment depending on full- or part-time attendance and address requirements in primary, elementary, secondary, and special education as set by the state in which they are located. If the institution's teacher education programs are approved and/or accredited, usually its alternatives also carry approval. However, it is appropriate for a prospective candidate to inquire about program approval and accreditation. While the programs do not guarantee licensure, they facilitate the state credentialing process.

Finding Employment

Most teachers seek employment in the state and county or school district where they reside (Feistritzer & Chester, 1996). However, moving from one state to another and finding a teaching job has

been simplified by the Interstate Compact, a mutual agreement by 38 states and the District of Columbia to recognize each other's licenses. Information on this contract and on state-approved programs can be found in a publication of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education & Certification (1998). Prospective teachers may find information on available positions at state department and school district offices, in county bulletins and newsletters, and on state education department web sites. In addition to the public school system, there are numerous private schools, organized by religious or cultural mission or by academic program. Teachers in 65% of these schools are not required to be licensed by the state, and state requirements vary (Williams, 1996). However, adequate teacher preparation and licensing enhance the likelihood of finding a teaching position, public or private.

Evaluation

Alternative paths to preparation were not universally welcomed in the world of teacher education. As with any new venture, they have been watched closely by teacher education institutions, state departments of education, and educational researchers. There was, and is, concern about whether they contribute to improving the quality of public education in the U.S. or further masking problems related to teacher quality (Hawley, 1992). Researchers have continued to discuss the trade-off between in-depth content area knowledge and professional education (Dixon & Ishler, 1992; Franke, 1991). Recent measurement studies see-saw between findings that alternative routes produce better results, but that traditionally prepared teachers remain in the classroom longer (Shen, 1997; Stoddart & Floden, 1995). Overall, the data collected present a mixed picture about the value of alternative paths (Miller, McKenna, & McKenna, 1998). Ultimately, if teachers so prepared contribute to improved student performance during the next decade, a national goal of U.S. education, alternative routes for teacher preparation will prevail (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1998).

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be available at most research libraries; most documents (ED) are available in microfiche collections at more than 900 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800)443-ERIC.

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